

THE
EXCERPTS
of the GOVERNOR
of
MONTAGNE AND BUREAU



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HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR

WORKS BY
LEONID ANDREIEFF

Translated by Maurice Magnus

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HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR



**AND IT CAME TO PASS
THAT THE KING WAS DEAD**



TO THE STARS: A Drama in Four Acts



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Andreev, Leonid Nikolaevich

HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR

BY LEONID ANDREIEFF. TRANSLATED FROM
THE RUSSIAN * BY MAURICE MAGNUS

* Губернатор (transliterated: Gubernator).



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HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR

I

FIFTEEN days had passed since that memorable occurrence, and yet it filled his mind—as though Time itself had lost its ascendancy over thought and things, or else had stopped like a broken clock. Wherever he might turn his fancy, in whatever strange and distant channels, still his hunted thoughts returned to that same incident, and ran, helpless, against it; as upon a great silent prison wall in a blind alley. And what strange paths these fancies took. He thought, for instance, of an Italian trip of long ago—a journey full of sunshine, youth and song. He pictured one of those Italian beggars, and directly rose before his vision the mob of workmen, the volley of musketry, the smell of powder, and the blood! Or perhaps a perfume rose to his brain, and at once he remembered his handkerchief—*that* had been perfumed too—and with *that* he had signalled for the firing!

Lick
under

At first the sequence of his thought had been logical—quite comprehensible; and though burdensome had caused him no uneasiness. But soon everything reminded him of that occasion,

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abruptly and with most painful untimeliness : like a blow from around the corner. He laughs, and suddenly he seems to hear general laughter on all sides, and sees with hideous clearness the face of one of the dead—although at the time he had not really thought of laughing : nor had the others laughed ! . . . Or else he hears the swallows twittering in the twilight ; or sees a chair—just a common oak chair ; or reaches for the—everything calls to his mind one and the same indelible scene—the white waving handkerchief, the shots, the blood ! As though he lived in a room with a thousand doors, and whichever one he tried to open, the same fixed picture met his gaze : the signal—the smoke—the blood !

The affair was simple enough of itself—though sad, of course. The workmen in a suburban factory, after a three weeks' strike, had gathered—some thousand strong—together with their women and children, their old and disabled, and had appeared before him with demands which he as Governor could not grant. And they had carried themselves impudently and defiantly ; had screamed ; insulted the officials—and one woman, who seemed quite beside herself, had plucked at his sleeve till the seam gave way. Then when his staff had led him back on to the balcony (he still only wanted to speak with them and pacify them) the workmen had begun to throw stones, had broken a number of windows, and wounded the Chief of Police. Then his rage

got the better of him and he gave the signal with his handkerchief !

The people were so turbulent that they had to be shot at a second time ; and so there were many dead—forty-seven, according to the count ; —among them nine women and three children, singularly enough all girls ! . . . The number of the wounded was even greater.

Drawn by a strange, unconquerable passion of curiosity, and against the advice of his people, he had gone to see the dead where they were laid out in the engine-house shed of the Police Station No. 3. Naturally there was no urgent reason for his going, but he felt that in some unaccountable way they would be the better for it if he saw to them himself ; as someone who has shot carelessly and at random feels moved to find where the bullet had lodged, and to handle it.

It was dark and cool in the long engine-house, and the bodies lay under a strip of grey canvas, in two precise rows, like a strange display of curious wares. They had probably been arranged for the Governor's visit, and were laid in careful order, shoulder to shoulder, with faces up. The canvas covered only their heads and the upper part of their bodies ; the legs were exposed as though to facilitate their counting—these stiff, immovable legs, some in old worn boots, some with tattered little shoes, and others bare and dirty, the sunburned skin showing strangely enough through the grime. The

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women and children were laid by themselves ; and here, too, one felt there had been an attempt to simplify the count.

And it was still, far too still for such a throng of people ; and the living who entered were unable to dispel the silence. From behind a wooden partition came the sound of a groom at work. He evidently thought himself alone—but for the dead—and talked to his horses with careless joviality : “ Whoa there, you devil ! Stand still while I curry you ! ”

The Governor glanced at the rows of legs that lost themselves in the gloom, and said, in his smothered bass, almost a whisper : “ How many are there ? ”

The Assistant Police Commissioner, a young, beardless fellow with a pimply face, stepped up from behind and, saluting, announced, in a loud voice : “ Thirty-five men, nine women and three children, your Excellency ! ”

The Governor frowned involuntarily, and the Assistant Police Commissioner bowed himself into the background. He would gladly have called the Governor’s attention to the neat lane between the corpses that had been carefully strewn with sand, but the Governor had no eyes for this, though he was staring fixedly at the floor.

“ Three children ? ”

“ Three, your Excellency. Would your Excellency wish the canvas removed ? ”

The Governor was silent.

"There are all sorts of persons here, your Excellency," continued the Commissioner, deferentially but briskly, while he took the Governor's silence for consent, and commanded, in hasty whispers: "Ivanoff! quick, Isidorshuck, take the other end—here, pull away now!"

With a soft, sliding rustle the dingy canvas came away and one after the other the white spots of faces dawned into view—bearded and old, young and smooth—all different, but united in the common likeness of death. One hardly saw the wounds and the blood, they were mostly hidden under their clothes; only in one face the eye appeared unnaturally dark and sunken, shedding strange black tears that looked in the dusk like tar. The majority had the same pale, blank stare; some had kept their identical twinkle, and one covered his face with his hand as though to shield it from the glare. But the Assistant Commissioner gazed with a pained expression at these corpses that so disturbed his sense of order.

The Governor felt that these pale faces had been among the mob that morning—in the foremost ranks, he knew; and many of them he had seen personally as he parleyed with them. But now they were all beyond his recognition. This new community with death had lent them a most singular expression! They lay there lifeless and motionless on the floor; like plaster casts made flat on the back that they might rest more firmly. Yet this immovability seemed

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counterfeited—one could hardly believe it real. They were dumb, and the silence seemed as artificial as their rigid pose ; but something about them of anxious expectancy made it painfully impossible for the observers to speak. If a busy city had suddenly been turned to stone, and all its inhabitants petrified at one blow ; if the sun had stood still, and the leaves had hushed their rustling, and all that walked or moved had stiffened—they might have shown this same strange look of interrupted effort, of breathless expectancy and mysterious alertness for what was yet to come.

“ May I ask if your Excellency wishes to order coffins or whether they shall be buried in a common trench ? ” asked the Assistant Commissioner, with loud *naïveté*: the exigencies of the emergency impressed him with a certain deferential self-confidence—and furthermore he was very young.

“ What sort of a trench ? ” asked the Governor perfunctorily.

“ You just dig a large ditch, your Excellency——” The Governor turned abruptly and left the place. As he entered the carriage he heard behind him the heavy grating of the rusty hinges—they were shutting in the dead.

Next morning he visited the wounded in the city hospital, still driven by that same tormenting curiosity : the longing to undo the inevitable, and to blot out the past. The dead at least stared at him, but these would not deign him a

glance ! And in the stubbornness with which they averted their eyes, he read the immutability of his accomplished act. It was finished ! Something monstrous had been done, and it was idle and useless to strive to alter the fact.

And from that very moment, Time for him had stood still, and this certain something inexplicable and unspeakable had come over him. It was not remorse, for he felt himself in the right ; nor was it pity, that gentle feeling that softly veils the heart and calls forth tears. He could think of these dead quite calmly ; even of the little children. Their pain and their sorrows hardly moved him. But he could not rid his thoughts of them—they were constantly before his mind in sharpest outline—these puppets, these broken dolls ! And therein lay the horrid mystery—a something, like the tales of magic of one's nursery days. According to others, four—five—seven—days had elapsed since the catastrophe—but for him in the meantime not one single hour had gone by. His thoughts played yet about that time—those shots—that signalling handkerchief !—the realisation that something irrevocable was about to happen—*had* happened !

He was convinced that he could far more easily be calm, and forget the things which no vain regrets could alter, if the people about him would be less pointed in their attentions. By their actions, looks and gestures ; their respectful, sympathetic manner, and their voices as though

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soothing a fretful invalid, they firmly fastened in his brain the thought of that ineradicable occurrence.

The Chief of Police announced the next day, in soothing tones, that two or three more of the wounded had been dismissed, cured, from the hospital ; each morning his wife, Maria Petrovna, pressed her lips to his forehead to see whether he had a fever—as though he were a child ! and those dead bodies—unripe fruit, of which he had eaten too freely ! What nonsense !

And eight days after the event the Right Reverend Bishop Micael himself called upon him, and at his first words clearly showed that he had the same notion as all the others, and had come to lighten the Governor's conscience. He spoke of the workmen as sinners, and called him a peacemaker—and all this without introducing a single one of his well-worn Bible texts—for he knew the Governor was not particularly fond of clerical prating. The old man appeared to distressing disadvantage as he lied so aimlessly in the face of his God.

During the interview the Bishop turned his deaf ear toward his companion, and, purple with rage (he could feel himself how the blood mounted to his brow) the Governor pouted his lips and trumpeted into that great bloodless ear that was turned toward him from that soft, grey bush of hair : “Sinners they may be, your Eminence ; nevertheless if I were in your place I should certainly say a Mass for their departed souls.”

The Bishop turned away his ear, smoothed down his waistcoat with a bony hand, and nodded his head as he answered, in his softest voice: "Each station has its own cross. Had I been in your Excellency's place I should never have ordered them shot, nor burdened the Holy Office with Masses for their souls. But that is neither here nor there—they were undoubtedly sinners! With a parting benediction he swept to the door—his gown rustling and swaying—bowing to each object that he passed as though blessing it. In the vestibule he fussed a long time with his barge-like goloshes, turning first one ear and then the other to the impatient Governor, who was helping him, with unwilling politeness: "Don't trouble, your Excellency! Oh, please don't trouble yourself!" And these words of his sounded to the Governor as if he were a helpless invalid to whom the least exertion might be fatal.

That same day the Governor's son, an officer in a St Petersburg regiment, came home for his Sunday furlough, and though he was in gay good humour, and gave no special reason for his unusual visit, it was evident that the same incomprehensible anxiety for the Governor had induced him to come. He made light of the whole affair, and assured them that in St Petersburg they were delighted with the pluck and energy of Peter Iljitch; and yet he strongly urged that they should ask for another Cossack regiment and double their precautionary measures. "What sort of precautionary measures?" asked

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the Governor, stern and amazed—but there was no answer. These apprehensions seemed all the more absurd as perfect calm had reigned in the city from that day on. The workmen had resumed their labours: even the interment had passed off undisturbed, though the Chief of Police had felt some anxiety, and ordered out all the reserves. Yet nothing indicated the possibility of a repetition of the incident of August seventeenth.

Finally he received from St Petersburg a flattering acknowledgment of his detailed report of the occurrence. One would have thought that this would lighten the load and sink his burden in the sea of the past! But the fact will not sink! As though deriving its power from Time and Death, it stands rigid in his remembrance—the unburied corpse of a vanished event. Stubbornly, night after night, he seeks to bury it; the darkness passes, day breaks, and there again—the beginning and end of all things, between him and the world stands that indelible picture: the signal with the white handkerchief, the crack of rifles, the blood!

THE Governor's audience has long been ended, and he is about to drive out to his villa, waiting on for his aide-de-camp Kosloff, who is shopping for her Excellency. He sits in his study, his papers before him, and yet he cannot work—he broods. Then, rising, he thrusts his hands deeper into the pockets of his red-striped trousers, throws back his great grey head, and paces the room with heavy, soldierly tread. He pauses at the window, spreads the strong, thick fingers of his hand, and says, in strident tones: “But what is it all about?” And he fancies that as long as he sat and thought he was an ordinary man like any other; simply Peter Iljitch—but with the first sound of his own voice, that gesture—he has suddenly become the Governor, the Major-General! An uneasy feeling creeps over him, his thoughts whirl and tangle; and with a curt official shrug of his left shoulder-strap he turns from the window and paces the floor again.

“*This is the way the Gov-er-nors walk!*” The rhythm jerks through his brain, keeping time with his heavy footfall until he seats himself again, carefully avoiding all movement that shall recall his official capacity.

The sound of a bell.

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"Has he come yet?"

"If you please, no, your Excellency."

And while the lackey speaks the title softly and respectfully, he suddenly recollects: "Ah yes! They broke the windows there that day, and I have not seen them yet." . . .

"Call me when he comes. I shall be in the drawing-room."

The high old-fashioned windows had eight small panes, which gave the room the gloomy look of an office: the appearance of a Court of Chancery, or of a jail. The three windows nearest the balcony had new panes, which still showed the marks of putty-daubed fingers; apparently it had never entered into the idle brains of any of the countless servants that all traces of that disturbance must be wiped away. It was the same old story—if you ordered them they would do it; if not they'd never lift a finger of their own accord. . . .

"Let this be cleaned directly! I can't stand this disorder!"

"Yes, your Excellency!"

He would have liked to step out onto the balcony, yet it seemed unwise to draw the attention of the passers-by, so he stared through the glass at the Square, where the mob had surged that day, where the rifles had crashed—and forty-seven restless people had been turned to dumb, still corpses!—row on row—shoulder to shoulder—feet to feet—like a parade seen from below.

Now all was still out there. Close by the window stands a poplar with ragged bark, already in autumn colouring, and behind it lies the Square, peaceful and sleepy in the sun. Hardly a stone stirring, and the cobble-stones lying in even rows like beads, with here and there a bit of grass between, greener in the hollows and along the gutters. Empty and deserted the Square was—but rather smiling; yet, perhaps because he saw it through the dingy panes, it appeared dismal and squalid, brooding in sullen apathy over its hopeless grey misery. And although it was broad daylight, yet all these things—the poplar with its ragged bark, the vacant, even rows of cobble-stones—seemed craving for the night to come and wrap their useless being in its darkness.

“Has he not come yet?”

“No, your Excellency.”

“When he comes bring him here.”

The drawing-room had been furnished in the time of the previous Governor, or possibly earlier still, judging from the soiled and faded condition of its costly hangings. About the brass-bound chimney hole were traced dark yellow stains, like lines about the drooling mouth of age. These were masked by hangings, and in winter when the rooms were lighted, one hardly noticed these defects; but now they crowded into view in all their shabby elegance, making a most painful impression. For instance, that landscape—a moonlight scene in Italy:

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it hangs crooked, yet no one gives it a straightening touch, and it seems to have hung so throughout the rule of successive Governors. The furniture, too, is costly, but worn and moth-eaten: like an apartment in a luxurious villa whose owner has suddenly died of a stroke, and whose estate has long lain in litigation, cared for by quarrelling heirs.

And nothing in the room was the property of its occupants; not even the photographs. Either they were official belongings or had been forgotten by some predecessor. Instead of portraits of friends and relatives, there was an album with views of the city: the seminary, the district court; then four unknown officials, two seated and two standing behind them; a weather-beaten bishop, and finally a round hole that ended at the cover.

"Hideous!" said the Governor aloud, and threw the album aside, with a gesture of loathing. He had been standing to look at the pictures, and now he turned again with a shrug and started his customary pacing. "*This-is-the-way-the-Gov-er-nors-walk, -the-Gov-er-nors-walk! the-Gov-er-nors-walk!*"

—So trod the former Governor, and his predecessor, and *his*, and all the other unknown Governors. They rose from somewhere, paced these halls with firm, square steps; while over them hung the crooked Italian landscape—held receptions, even gave balls—and then vanished again somewhere. Perhaps they too had ordered

the people shot—at least something similar had occurred under his third predecessor.

A workman was crossing the deserted square, splashed with paint, and carrying his paint and brushes—then all was empty again. Down from the ragged poplar fell a shrivelled leaf, floating aimlessly to the ground—and instantly the thought whirled through his head: that signal with the white handkerchief—the shots—the blood!

Trivial detail occurred to him now; how he had prepared to give the signal. He had pulled his handkerchief from his pocket beforehand and held it tightly clutched in a ball in his right hand; then he unfolded it carefully and waved it hastily, not up and down, but forward and out, as though he were tossing something—as though he were flinging bullets! Then it came to him that he had taken a stride—had crossed an invisible threshold—the iron door had clanged behind him with a loud grating of its iron hinges, and there was no return.

“Ah, you at last, Leo Andrejevitch. I’ve waited—the Lord knows how long!”

“I’m sorry, Peter Iljitch, but you never can find anything in this beastly hole.”

“Now, let’s be off! Come! Yes, but listen!” The Governor stood still and continued, pursing his lips: “Why are all our public offices so dirty? Take, for instance, our government office; or—I was in the police department the other day—I tell you it’s a pot-house, a

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stable—and decent men sit there in good, fresh uniform, with the dirt about in heaps!”

“But there’s no money!”

“Nonsense! Quibbles! And here”—the Governor waved his hand to indicate the walls—“look at that now—disgusting!”

“Yes, but, Peter Iljitch, what’s to hinder your doing it over to suit yourself? How often have I said that very thing to Maria Petrovna, and her Excellency agrees with me thoroughly.”

The Governor strode to the door, muttering: “It’s not worth while!”

His aide cast a pitying glance at the broad back, at his stringy, muscular neck like a double column supporting the head, and, striving to keep anxiety out of his voice, he remarked: “By the way, I’ve just seen ‘the Pike’; he tells me that the last of the wounded was dismissed from the hospital yesterday. He was the worst of the lot, and seemed to have very little chance. But these peasants have the most astonishing vitality!” In private the Chief of Police was known as “the Pike” because of his pale, bulgy eyes, and his long, lank body, with its narrow, fin-like back.

The Governor made no answer. He was enjoying the autumn sunshine and the keen autumn air—a mixture of languor and crispness, as though each could be enjoyed by itself; here freshness, and there a wave of heat:—and the heavens were so lovely—tender, distant, and

such a wonderful, startling blue. How perfect it must be in the country now !

He had already seated himself in the carriage, and moved over to make room for the aide, when a man passed by with a peculiar stoop. As he pulled off his cap he shielded his face with his elbow, so that the Governor had only a glimpse of a shock of curly fair hair and a tanned young throat—he noticed that he trod carefully and noiselessly, as though he had been barefooted, and that he bent over as if looking backward. “What a singularly unpleasant person !” thought he. Evidently the two men following the Governor thought so too. They were stepping into a carriage close at hand. With the rapid glance of professional keenness, they turned simultaneously to note the fellow, but finding nothing questionable about him, hurried on to precede the Governor.

They were in a smart rubber-tired trap—the wheels leaped, the body swayed, and they sat leaning forward on account of the rapid motion, and had soon left the Governor far behind in order not to annoy him with their dust.

“Who are those two ?” he asked his aide, looking at him suspiciously from the corner of his eye—and the other answered carelessly: “Secret Police.”

“What’s that for ?” asked the Governor abruptly.

“I don’t know,” said Leo Andrejevitch evasively ; “that’s ‘the Pike’s’ affair.”

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At the corner stood the beardless young Police Commissioner, strutting and admiring his shiny lacquered boots—the same one who had accompanied the Governor on his inspection of the bodies; and as they passed the police headquarters two mounted guards rode out from under the arch, their horses' hoofs pounding behind in the dust. Their faces beamed with officious zeal, and they both gazed steadily at the Governor's back. The aide pretended not to notice, but the Governor threw a lowering glance at the men, and then, with his white-gloved hands tightly clenched on his knees, he lost himself in gloomy thought.

The road to the villa circled the outskirts of the town, through a lane called Kanatnaja alley, where factory hands and their families lived, crowded by all sorts of miserable beings from the city—some in wretched tumble-down huts, and some in two-story brick tenements of barrack-like uniformity. The Governor would gladly have bowed if he had seen anyone; but the street was empty, as though it were late at night—not even the children about. Only one little lad appeared for a moment behind a fence, among the red leaves of a rowan-tree, but even he slid hastily from the trunk and hid in the gateway. Through the summer the alley had been crowded with chickens and lean, dirty pigs, but there were none left now—apparently they had all been eaten in the three weeks' famine.

Nothing even indirectly recalled the catas-

trophe, but in the empty silence of the street, so indifferent to the Governor's passing, lay something heavy, sullen, brooding—and a light cloud of incense seemed to hang in the transparent air.

"Listen!" cried the Governor suddenly, grasping his companion's knee. "That man there——"

"What man?"

The Governor did not answer. Firmly clutching his knee, he gazed at the aide with a face like a barred and shuttered house whose doors and windows have suddenly been thrown open. Then he knit his heavy grey brows, deliberately turned his ponderous back, and gazed intently out of the carriage. The horses of the guard pounded down the road, and the dismal, lonely lane, dark on one side, bright sunlight on the other, was also sunk in dreary brooding. . . .

Like a stampeded herd the cottages huddled together; with their riddled roofs, their broken benches, and their overhanging windows—like greybeards' chins thrust out. Then came a vacant lot, with a broken fence and an old well, sunk about the rim and boarded over; then a row of great lime-trees behind a high broken wall, and a stately old house that had drifted somehow to these wastes, but was now long since abandoned. Its shutters were closed, and on a sign could be read: "This House for Sale." Then beyond came cottages again, and a row of brick houses—large, bleak and hideous, with deep-set narrow windows. They were quite new—you could still see the caked plaster lying about, and

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the holes where the scaffolding had been ; but they were already squalid and neglected. They looked like prisons, and life in such a place must be fully as sad, as hopeless, and as narrow as a life in jail !

There is the gateway to the open fields, and the last little house—no trace of vegetation about it, no fence. It stands there leaning forward, walls and roof both, as though someone had shoved it violently from behind—and neither in the windows nor anywhere about a single person visible.

“ After the fall rains you’ll have trouble, Peter Iljitch, getting the carriage through here. I should think you’d literally sink in the mud ! ”

III

LAUGHTER and song and merry games—for to-morrow Peter Iljitch's son, the officer, returned to St Petersburg, and friends had gathered to say good-bye. Uniforms and gay frocks were scattered about in the open glades and meadows, under the purple and gold of the autumn foliage, and in the sapphire clearness of the woodland ways. As the red wintry sunset faded and the stars moved by in the heavens, they set off fireworks—rockets that burst with a loud report, star-mines and pin-wheels. A stifling smoke crept under the great old trees that stood there, so earnestly watching; and when they started the Bengal lights, hurrying figures were changed to ghosts—to fluttering, flitting shadows!

Commissioner "Pike," who had pretty freely quenched his thirst at dinner, gazed indulgently at the gay throng, strutted comically about among the ladies, and enjoyed himself. And when presently he heard the Governor's voice close beside him in the smoky darkness, he was taken with a wild desire to kiss him on the shoulder, to hug him carefully—or any little thing of that kind—as an expression of his devotion. Instead of this, however, he laid his hand on the left breast of his uniform, threw away a cigarette

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he had just lighted, and said: "Ah! your Excellency, what a charming fête!" . . .

"Listen, Illawion Wassiljevitch," interrupted the Governor, with a suppressed growl. "Why do you always set these spies here? What does it mean?"

"Some rascal might plan an attack on your Excellency's sacred person," said "the Pike," with deep emotion, and laying both hands on his heart. "And then, besides, . . . it is my duty!"

Popping of fire-crackers, shrieks of terror, and loud laughter drowned his words. Then a sudden rain fell, extinguishing the red and green fires which had illuminated the smoky darkness, and made the Governor's buttons and epaulets shine out.

"I know the reason, Illawion Wassiljevitch—that is, I think I can guess it. But I think it can hardly be serious."

"It is most exceedingly serious, your Excellency! The whole town is talking of it. Astonishing how busily they talk about it! I have already arrested three men—but they were the wrong ones."

A fresh outburst of firing and gay shouts interrupted him, and when the noise had subsided the Governor had gone.

After supper they all drove off, marshalled by the young Assistant Commissioner. Everything: the fireworks which he had seen from behind the trees, the carriages and the people, seemed to him extraordinarily lovely, and his own fresh voice

astonished him with its beauty and its power. "The Pike" was horribly drunk, cracked jokes, laughed, and even sang the first few bars of the *Marseillaise*:

"Allons, enfants de la patrie,
Le jour de gloire est arrivé!" . . .

At last they had all gone. "What are you worrying about so, father?" said the lieutenant, laying his hand on Peter Iljitch's shoulder with patronising kindness. The Governor was very much loved by his family, and the Governor's lady even feared him a trifle; but they all felt that he had aged sadly in these last few weeks, and their fondness was not without a tinge of contempt.

"Nonsense! Nothing but nonsense!" answered Peter Iljitch hesitatingly. For some reasons he would gladly have unburdened himself to his son, but then again their views differed so radically that he had feared this explanation. Yet now this very difference of opinion might be of use. "The thing is this, you see," he continued, with some embarrassment, "this trouble with the workmen makes me somewhat uneasy."

Their eyes met square—but the son's face was blank with astonishment as he dropped his hand from his father's shoulder, saying: "But I thought you had your 'Honourable Mention' from St Petersburg!"

"Certainly—and it pleased me very much. And yet . . . Aljosha!" He gazed into his

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son's fine eyes with the clumsy tenderness of a stern old man. "They aren't Turks after all, are they? They're as much Russians as we—their names are Ivan and Peter, like ours.—And yet I treated them like Turks! 'Hm? How does the thing strike you now?"

"It strikes me that you are a Revolutionist!"

"But they wear the cross upon their breasts, Aljosha! And I"—he raised his finger—"I ordered them to fire at those crosses!"

"As far as I've seen you, father, you've never shown any particular religious scruples before. What have the crosses to do with it? That might be a telling point if you were addressing your regiment in the Square, or for some such occasion, but——"

"To be sure! Of course!" agreed the Governor hastily; "the crosses are aside from the argument. The point I want to make is this—that they are fellow-beings. Do you understand, Aljosha; fellow-countrymen! Yes, if I were some German now, called August Karlovitch Schlippe-Detmold! . . . but my name is Peter—and Iljitch besides!"

The lieutenant's voice was rather dry. "You have such distorted notions, father! What have the Germans to do with this affair? And then, for that matter, haven't Germans shot down Germans, and Frenchmen the French—and so on? Why shouldn't Russians fire on Russians? As a representative of the Government, you certainly know that law and order must be sup-

ported at all costs ; and whoever it may be who disturbs them—the same rule applies. If I were the guilty one, it would be your *duty* to have me shot down like a Turk ! ”

“ That’s true,” said the Governor, nodding thoughtfully, and beginning to pace the floor. “ That’s quite true ! ” And then he stopped. “ But they were driven by hunger, Aljosha. If you could have seen them ! ”

“ There were the peasants in Sensivjevo—they rose because they were famished too—but that didn’t keep you from giving them a good dose of the knout ! ”

“ Flogging is a very different thing from—That fool laid them all out in a row ! Like game at the end of a hunt ! And I looked at their poor thin legs, and thought : ‘ These legs will never walk again ! ’ You cannot understand, Alexey ! Of course, as a matter of State, an executioner is a necessity—but to *be* the executioner ! ”

“ What are you talking about, father ? ”

“ I know—I feel it—they will kill me yet !—It’s not that I fear death ”—the Governor raised his grey head and looked steadily at his son—“ but I know . . . they will surely kill me ! I never understood before. I only thought : ‘ What is it all about ? ’ ”—he stretched his powerful fingers and then doubled them into a fist. “ But now I understand : they mean to kill me ! Don’t laugh ; you are young yet. But I have felt death to-day—here, in my head. Yes, in my head ! ”

“ Father, I beg of you, send for the Cossacks !

Demand a bodyguard! They'll grant you anything! I beg of you, as your son, and I ask it in the name of Russia, to whom your life is precious!"

"And who is to kill me but this same Russia? And why should I have the Cossacks? . . . To defend me from Russia—in the *name* of Russia! And after all, could Cossacks, spies or guards, save a man with death branded on his forehead? You've been drinking a good deal this evening, Alexey, but you are sober enough to understand this: I feel the hand of death! Even there in the storehouse, where they laid the bodies, I felt it; yet then I did not realise what it was. This I've just been telling you, about crosses and Russians, is nonsense, of course—has nothing to do with the thing. But do you see this handkerchief?" Eagerly he drew a handkerchief from his pocket, unfolded it, and held it up for inspection like a conjurer: "Alexey Petrovitch, now look here!" He waved it hastily and a subtle perfume was wafted to the lieutenant, who sat there looking anxious. "There, you doubting scientist! you *fin-de-siècle* thinker! You believe in nothing—but I believe in the old law: Blood for blood! You will see!"

"Father, send in your resignation, and travel."

He seemed to have expected this advice, and was not at all surprised. "No—not for the world," he answered firmly; "you can see for yourself that would be tantamount to flight. Nonsense! Not for the world!"

“Forgive me, father, but you seem so unreasonable!” The lieutenant cocked his head and shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t know really what to think. Mother groans and you talk of death—and what is it all about? I’m ashamed of you, father! I’ve always considered you a man of discernment and force, and now you’re like a child or a hysterical woman. Forgive me! But I cannot understand it at all!”

He himself was not in the least hysterical, nor in the slightest degree womanish—this handsome young fellow, with his fresh, smooth-shaven face and the calm, finished manner of a man who not only respects himself but reveres himself! He always seemed to be the sole individual in a crowd; and you must be a most distinguished person (a general at the very least) to have him aware of you and to make him overcome that slight constraint and reserve that the average public inspired in him. He was a good swimmer and loved the sport, and when he went to the baths on the Neva in the summer-time he noted his own perfect symmetry as coolly and complacently as though he were quite alone. . . . One day a Chinaman appeared at the baths, and everyone stared at him—some with a sneaking curiosity and some quite openly and unabashed. He alone did not vouchsafe him a glance—considering himself far more interesting and more important than any Chinaman. . . .

Everything in the world was clear and simple

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to him ; everything could be reduced to a formula—and he knew that with the Cossacks things would certainly go better than without the Cossacks.

His reproaches had a ring of righteous indignation, only tempered by politeness and the fear of wounding the old man's vanity. All this that his father had told him was not entirely unexpected. He had always known him to be a dreamer. But it struck him as something coarse, barbarous, atavistic. "Crosses ! Blood for blood ! Ivan and Peter !" How absurd it all was !

"You're a poor stick of a Governor, even if they have given you an 'Honourable Mention,'" thought he slowly, as he followed his father's retreating figure with his handsome eyes. . . .

"Well, what is it, father—are you vexed with me ? "

"No," answered the Governor simply. "I am grateful for your sympathy, and you'll do well to quiet your mother. As to myself I am perfectly convinced ! I've explained my impressions to you now. This is my view of it, and yours is different. We shall see which is correct !—But now, be off to bed. It's time you went to sleep."

"I'm not tired yet. Shan't we take a turn in the garden ? "

"That suits me."

They went out into the darkness and disappeared from each other's view—only their

voices and an occasional hasty touch disturbing their sense of a strange, all-embracing loneliness. The stars, on the other hand, were numberless, and sparkled in bright companionship, and when they reached the open, out from under the close-set trees, Alexey Petrovitch could distinguish at his side the tall, heavy silhouette of his father. The night, the air and the stars had called up a tenderer feeling for this dark shadowy presence, and he repeated his reassuring explanations.

"Yes, yes," answered Peter Iljitch from time to time—though it was not quite clear whether he agreed or not.

"But how dark it is!" said Alexey Petrovitch, and stood still. They had come to a shady walk where the darkness was complete. "You should have lanterns put here, father!"

"What for? Tell me——"

They both stood still, and now that the sound of their steps was hushed, the loneliness reigned unbroken—unbounded!

"Well, what is it?" asked Alexey Petrovitch impatiently.

"Does this darkness mean anything to you?"

"Dreaming again!" thought the lieutenant, and observed, with jaunty gaiety: "It means that you are not to wander about here alone! Anywhere in these woods they might have laid an ambush."

"An ambush! Yes, that's what the darkness tells me too. Imagine! Behind each one of these trees sits a man—an invisible man—

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watching! So many men—forty-seven—as many as we killed that day! And they sit there and hear what I say—and spy!”

The lieutenant had grown nervous. He searched the darkness round about and took a step forward. “How unnecessary to excite yourself so!” he exclaimed involuntarily.

“No—but wait a moment!” The son started as he felt a light touch of the hand. “Picture to yourself that everywhere—there in the town even, and wherever I go—they are lying in wait. If I walk—he walks too; and watches me! Or I get into the carriage, and a man passes and pulls off his cap—he is spying on me!”

The darkness grew sinister, and the invisible speaker’s voice sounded strange and distant.

“That will do, father, let’s go!” said the lieutenant, striding hastily off without waiting for his father.

“You see now, my dear boy!” came in Peter Iljitch’s deep voice, with a startling ring of mockery. “You wouldn’t believe me when I told you! There he sits in your own head!”

The lights in the house seem so far and dim that the lieutenant feels a mad impulse to run. If he might only reach them! . . . He almost doubts his own courage, and at the same time develops a feeling of respect for his father, who strides so calmly along through the darkness.

But fear and respect both vanish as soon as

he enters the well-lighted rooms ; and nothing remains but the impression of rage against his father, who will not listen to the voice of Reason, and refuses the Cossack guard with the stubbornness of senility !

IV

SUMMER and winter, the Governor rose at seven, had his cold tub, drank his milk, and took his two-hour walk—no matter what the weather. He had given up smoking early in life, hardly drank at all, and at fifty-six years, for all his white hair, he was as sound and fresh as a stripling. His teeth were even, powerful, and slightly yellowed with tartar, like those of an old horse. The eyes were a bit puffy, but full of fire still ; and his great fleshy old nose bore the marks of his glasses. He never wore a pince-nez, but for reading or writing used a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles with powerful lenses.

In the country he busied himself very much with his garden. He cared very little for flowers, or the purely æsthetic side of horticulture, but had built fine conservatories and a forcing house, where he cultivated peaches. Since the day of the catastrophe he had only glanced into the hothouse one single time, and then had come hastily away—there was something so pleasant, so peaceful, and consequently so grievous ! in the warm, damp air.

The greater part of his days, when he was not busy in town, he spent in the vast park, pacing with firm, direct steps down the long avenues that traversed its fifteen dessiatines. He was

not much given to reflection. Now and again lively and interesting thoughts came to him, never with any particular sequence, and wandered through his brain like an unshepherded flock. And sometimes for hours he strode along, lost in thought and oblivious to his surroundings; yet could not have told what matters he had been pondering. Occasionally he was made aware of a deep and mighty working of his soul; at times tormenting, at times exalting—but to what it all tended he never understood. And only his changing moods, from grave to gay, from tender to severe, gave index in his character of this mysterious, secret expansion in the depths of his being. Since the catastrophe his moods (no matter what his clearer thoughts might be) were gloomy, wild, hopeless; and whenever he woke from his deep brooding he felt that he passed this interval through a long and horrible night.

In his youth he had once been caught by the fierce current of a river, and almost drowned; and for years he carried the impress on his soul of that strangling darkness, his faintness, the eager, greedy sucking depths. And what he now endured was that same feeling!

One sunny, windless morning, two days after his son's departure, he was out again on the avenue, pacing in silent thought. The yellow leaves that had fallen in the night had already been swept away, and across the marks of the broom, the tracks of his large feet, with their high heels, and broad, square soles, showed clear—

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deep pressed into the soil; as though to the weight of the man himself had been added the burden of his ponderous thought, pressing him to the earth! Now and again he paused, and over his head in the tangle of sunlit branches was heard the rhythmic hammer of a woodpecker. Once while he stood still a little squirrel ran across the path. He darted from tree to tree like a fluffy ball of red fur.

"They will certainly kill me with a revolver—you can buy such good revolvers now," he thought. "They don't understand much about bombs here yet—and then bombs are only for the man who runs; Aljoshka, for instance!—when he is made Governor they'll kill him with a bomb!" thought Peter Iljitch, and his bearded lip curled with a slight ironical smile, though his eyes were fixed and gloomy. "I wouldn't run—no, bad as it is, I wouldn't run!"

He halted and brushed a cobweb from his fatigue jacket. "A pity, though, that no one will ever know of my notion of honour and my pluck. They know all the rest, but that they can never know. They'll shoot me down like any old scoundrel. Too bad! But there's nothing for it—I shan't speak of it! Why try to rouse the Judge's pity? It's not honourable to work on his feelings—his position is hard enough at best—and now they come and whine for mercy! I am a man of honour, I tell you—honourable!" . . .

It was the first time he had thought of a judge ;

and he wondered how he had happened to think of it. It came to him as if the question had long ago been settled. As though he had slept, and in his dreams someone had explained most convincingly all the necessary details about the judge, and when he awoke he had forgotten the particulars, but only remembered that there *was* a judge—a law-abiding justice, panoplied with authority, and encompassed with threatening might! And now, after the first moment of astonishment, he met the thought of this unknown judge as though he were an old and valued friend. . . . “Aljosha could never understand that! According to him everything must be ‘for reasons of State.’ But what sort of statesmanship was that: shooting a hungry mob? Interests of State demand that the starving be *fed*—and not shot at! He is young and inexperienced yet, and easily influenced.” . . . But before he had quite finished this complacent thought, he suddenly realised that he himself, and not Aljosha, had ordered the firing! . . . The air suddenly grew close, and he heard (absurdly enough) a single mighty, awful thunder: “Too late!” . . . He was not sure whether it were simply a thought or a feeling, or if he had pronounced it. It rang on every side, and menaced him like lightning overhead. Then came a long time of bewilderment; hasty disbanding of thoughts, and painful shattering of ideas—finally, a calm—so complete that it seemed indifference! . . .

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The windows of the forcing house twinkled in the sunshine among the trees, and the wild grape-vine's red leaves glowed like bloodstains against the white angles of its walls. Following his custom, the Governor turned down the narrow path between the empty hotbeds and stepped into the forcing-house. Only one workman was pottering about, old Jegor.

"Is the gardener not here?"

"No, your Excellency. He has gone to town for cuttings to-day; this is Friday."

"Aha! . . . And is everything doing well?"

"Thanks be!"

The sunshine streamed through the open windows, driving out the close, heavy dampness. You felt how hot and strong the sun was, and yet how gentle—how beneficent! The Governor sat down, the light sparkling on the metal of his uniform. He undid his jacket and, watching the old man attentively, said: "Well, how goes it, Brother Jegor?"

The old fellow answered this friendly but somewhat indefinite question with a polite smile. He stood up and rubbed his dirty hands together.

"Tell me, Jegor—I hear they're going to kill me—on account of the workmen that time, you know!" Jegor kept on smiling politely, but no longer rubbed his hands—he hid them behind his back and was speechless! "What do you think about it, my man—will they kill me, or not? Can you read and write? . . . Then tell

me what you think. . . . We two old fellows can talk it over frankly, can't we ? ”

Jegor shook his head until a lock of soft grey fell over his eyes, stared at the Governor, and answered : “ Who can tell . It may be so, Peter Iljitch ! ”

“ And who is to kill me ? ”

“ Why, the people, to be sure ! ‘ The Community,’ as they say in the village.”

“ And what does the gardener think about it ? ”

“ I don't know, Peter Iljitch. . . . I haven't heard.”

Both sighed deeply.

“ It looks rather bad for us, doesn't it, old fellow ? . . . But sit down ! ”

Jagor did not accept the invitation, and was silent.

“ And I thought I was doing the right thing ! . . . the shooting, I mean. They were throwing stones, insulting me. They almost hit me ! ”

“ They only do that when they're in trouble. The other day again, on the market-place, a drunken man—an apprentice or some such thing—who knows !—began to cry and cry ; and then he picked up a stone, and bang ! he let it fly ! . . . and only just because he was in trouble ! ”

“ They will kill me, and then they'll be sorry themselves,” said the Governor thoughtfully, trying to call to his mind the face of his son Alexey Petrovitch.

“ Sorry they'll surely be—that's certain. . . .

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Oh, how sorry they'll be! Bitter tears they'll shed!"

A ray of hope dawned.

"Then why do they want to kill me? . . . That's nonsense, old man!"

The workman gazed wide-eyed into space, with veiled pupils and a rigid attitude. For an instant he seemed petrified; the soft folds of his worn cotton shirt, the fuzzy hair, the grimy hands, all seemed like an enchantment brought about by a skilful artist who had wrapped the hard stone in soft, downy raiment.

"Who can tell!" answered Jegor, without looking at him. "The people seem to wish it! . . . But don't trouble about it any more, your Excellency. You know we have to have our foolish gossip. . . . And they'll take a long time—and talk; and then forget it themselves!"

The ray of hope vanished.

What Jegor had said was nothing new, nor especially clever; but his words had a singular ring of conviction, like those dreams that came to the Governor as he paced his long lonely avenues. The one phrase, "The people wish it," was a clear expression of what Peter Iljitch had felt—it was convincing, irrefutable! But perhaps this strange conviction lay not so much in the words of Jegor as in his set look—his fuzzy hair, and his broad, earth-stained hands! . . . And the sun still shone!

"Well, good-bye, Jegor. . . . Have you any children?"

“Good health to you, Peter Iljitch!”

The Governor shrugged his shoulders, buttoned his coat, and pulled a rouble from his pocket. “Here, take that, old man! Buy yourself something with it.”

With a nod of thanks, Jegor held out his old flat hand, where the silver balanced as on a roof.

“What singular beings they are!” mused the Governor, as he strode down the walk in the flickering shade; his own figure checkered by sun and shadow as he went. “Very strange creatures! . . . They wear no wedding rings, and you can never tell whether they are married or not. . . . However—— No! They do wear rings, but they are silver . . . or tin maybe! How odd! Tin rings! . . . These fellows get married and cannot even afford gold wedding rings for three roubles—What misery! . . . I didn’t notice! Those bodies in the storeroom probably had tin rings on too. Yes, now I recollect: tin rings with a very thin band!”

Lower and lower, in ever-narrowing circles, swung his fancy; like a hawk hovering over a field, and swooping down to pick up one small grain! . . . A woodpecker hammered, a shrivelled leaf fell and floated away, and he himself floated off in a painful, troubled day-dream. . . . A workman—his face is young and handsome, but in all the wrinkles black grime of toil has settled—iron filings that have eaten into the skin, and worn the hair prematurely. His broad mouth is hideously wide open . . . he

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screams! He is calling something. His shirt is torn over his chest, and he tears it yet more open—easily, noiselessly, like soft paper; baring his breast. His chest, and half his throat, are white; but above that line he is dark—as though his figure were like all other men's, but they had put another sort of head upon it.

"Why do you tear your shirt? It is horrible to see your naked body!" But the bare, white breast is thrust wildly toward him. "Here, take it! Here it is! . . . But give us justice! . . . We want justice! . . ."

"But where shall I find justice? How singular you are!"

A woman speaks.

"The children are all dead! The children are all dead! The children . . . the children . . . the children have all died!"

"That is why it is so lonely down your lane!"

"The children! The children! The children are all dead! The children!"

"But it is impossible that a child should die of hunger! A child . . . a little creature who cannot even reach the cupboard door itself! You do not love your children! If my child were hungry I should give it food! . . . But you even wear tin rings!"

"Ah! We wear iron rings! Our bodies are bound. Our souls are bound. We wear iron rings!"

On the back steps in the shed a maid was brushing Maria Petrovna's skirt. The kitchen

windows stood open: one could see the cook in his spotless jacket. It smelled of refuse . . . it was dirty. "What have I come to!" said the Governor, in amazement. . . . "Why, it's the kitchen. What was I thinking of? Ah yes! I wanted to see the time! How soon will luncheon be ready? It's early yet . . . ten o'clock. . . . But it seems to disturb them to have me here. . . . I must go!" And he turned into his accustomed path, and wandered up and down, thinking steadily.

And the manner of his thought was of one who fords a great and unknown river. Now the water reaches to his knees . . . he presses on! But finally sinks from sight; only to struggle up later, breathless and pale! . . . He thought of his son Alexey Petrovitch—tried to think of his office and his affairs; but wherever he led his fancies they always harked back unexpectedly to the catastrophe, and burrowed there as in an inexhaustible mine. It seemed strange that nothing happening before that event had the power to hold his attention . . . the past all seemed so trivial, so superfluous!

It was in the second year of his governorship, some five years ago, that he had ordered the knout for the peasants of Sensiwjewe. On that occasion also he had received an Honourable Mention from the Minister; and from that event dated the rapid and glittering career of Alexey Petrovitch, who was regarded with some attention as the son of an energetic and far-sighted

man. He dimly remembered (it was so long ago) that the peasants had taken some grain from the proprietors by force, and he had come, with a detachment of soldiers and police, to restore it to the owners of the estates. The affair was nothing terrible, nothing threatening in itself, but rather farcical!

The soldiers dragged away the sacks of grain, and the peasants lay down on them and were dragged too, amid the laughter and jeers of the force, to whom the whole thing was a huge lark! But the fellows began to shriek and fight; striking out and running amuck against the fences—the walls—the soldiers! . . . One of them, torn from his sack of grain, fumbled silently in the grass with his trembling hands, looking for a stone to throw. Not a stone could he find, but he kept on hunting till a policeman, at a signal from his chief, kicked him in the rear, so that he fell on all fours, and crawled away.

But they all, these peasants, seemed to be made of wood. They were so clumsy, almost creaking in their movements! To turn one of them forward where he belonged took two men. Then, faced about, he still was uncertain where to look; and when he was finally settled, he could not tear himself away again, so that it took two men to force him back.

"Here, uncle, off with your clothes! You're going swimming!"

"What!" asked the peasant, dumbfounded. "How?"—although the thing was so perfectly

clear and simple. A rough hand loosened the single button, the clothes fell, and the lean, bare peasant back stood out, unabashed. They laid the lash on lightly, more as a threat than as a punishment, and the mood of the whole affair was simply comical. On the homeward march the soldiers raised a jolly chorus, and those about the carts where the peasants were bound winked at them genially.

It was autumn. Wind-swept clouds hung over the bare stubble fields, and they all marched off to the city . . . to the light! But the village behind them still lay as before; under its depressing sky, in the midst of its dark, sodden, loamy fields, with their short, spare stubble . . .

"The children are all dead! The children are all dead! . . . The children! The children! . . .

The gong sounded for luncheon. Its clear, penetrating tones rang cheerily through the park. Abruptly the Governor faced about and glanced sharply at his watch. "Ten minutes to twelve!" He put the watch back and stood still. "Disgraceful!" he cried, in a rage, his mouth trembling with emotion. "Disgraceful! I'm almost afraid I'm a coward!"

After luncheon he went to his study to look through the mail from town. Grumbling, and woolgathering and blinking through his glasses, he sorted the envelopes, laying some aside and cutting others carefully, to skim through their

contents. Presently he came upon a note in a narrow envelope of cheap, thin paper, pasted over with yellow stamps of one copek. He opened it as carefully as he had the others. When he laid the envelope to one side he unfolded the thin, ink-splotched sheet, and read :

“ Butcher of our Children ! ”

Whiter and whiter grew his face, till it was almost as white as his hair. And his dilated pupils stared through the thick convex glasses at the words :

“ Butcher of our Children ! ”

The letters were large, crooked and pointed, and terribly black—they staggered uncertainly across the rough, coarse paper and cried :

“ Butcher of our Children ! ”

ALREADY the city knew that the Governor was to be killed. They had heard it at dawn of the day after the shooting. None spoke of it openly, but all felt it ; as though while the living lay in their uneasy sleep, the dead were stretched out quietly in careful order . . . shoulder to shoulder, in the engine-room, a dark shape had floated over the city, shadowing it with its wings. And the people spoke of the assassination of the Governor as a foregone conclusion—an irrevocable fact. Some accepted it at once ; others, more conservative, not till later. Some took it carelessly for granted as a thing that concerned them but slightly ; like an eclipse, only visible in another hemisphere, and hardly interesting the inhabitants of this one. Others, a small minority, rose and agitated the question whether the Governor deserved this fearful sentence—whether the death of one single individual, no matter how dangerous, could have any effect while the general conditions of the living were unchanged. Opinions differed, but even the most heated arguments were impersonal, as though the question were not a possibility of the future, but already an accomplished fact which no discussion might alter.

Among the better educated the arguments

took a broader theoretical stand, and the Governor's personality was forgotten, as though he were already dead. The debate proved that the Governor had more friends than enemies, and many even of those who believed ethically in political assassination found excuses for him. Had a vote been taken in the city, probably an overwhelming majority, on various practical or theoretical grounds, would have cast their ballot against the death—or as some called it, the “execution”!

But the women, generally so merciful and timid at the sight of blood, showed in this case a surprising grimness—a pitiless spite. Nearly all demanded his death—the most hideous death! Reasoning had no power over them; they held their opinions stubbornly, with a certain brute force. A woman might be convinced by evening that the assassination was unnecessary, but next morning she would awake firm in her original conviction; as though she had slept off the effects of the argument overnight!

Bewilderment and confusion reigned supreme. A disinterested listener, hearing their talk, could not have gathered whether the Governor should be killed or not, and might have asked, in amazement: “But where did you get the idea that he must die? . . . And who is to kill him?” . . . But there would be no answer. Soon, however, he would see, as all the others did, that the Governor *must* be killed—that his death was

imperative ! . . . yet he would have known as little as all the rest from what source this knowledge came. Everyone—friend or foe of the Governor—partisan or prosecutor—all gave themselves up to the one unswerving thought of his death. Ideas differed, and words differed, but the feeling was the same: a mighty, all-pervading conviction, strong and immutable as death itself !

Born in the dark, itself a part of the unfathomable darkness, it reigned triumphant and menacing . . . and all in vain men sought to illuminate it with the feeble light of their intelligence. As though the hoary withered law, “A death for a death,” had waked from its torpid sleep, opened its glazed eyes, gazed on the slaughtered children, the men and the women, and had stretched its remorseless arm over the head of their slayer. And the people, thinking and unthinking, inclined themselves to this law, and avoided the sinner. He was at the mercy of any death that might come. And from all sides—from dark corners, from fields, woods and hollows—they pressed about him : reeling, limping, dull and abject—not even interested !

So it might have been in those far-distant times while still there were prophets among men ; when thoughts and words were scarcer, and this same hoary Law, that punished death with death, was young. When the beasts made friends with man, and the lightning was his brother ! In those strange days of old, the guilty must pay

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for death in kind. The bee stung him, the ox gored him, the overhanging stone awaited his coming to fall and crush his defenceless head; disease gnawed him, as the jackal gnaws the carrion; arrows turned in their flight, only to strike his black heart or his downcast eyes; and rivers changed their course only to wash the sands from beneath his feet—even the majestic ocean dashed its tattered waves on high and threatened him with its roar—till he fled to the desert. A thousand deaths—thousand graves! The desert buried him under her soft sands; she wept and smiled, and over him her winds blew, whistling. And the sun itself—that life-giver—seared his dead brain with careless laugh, and softly beamed on the creatures that swarmed in the hollows of his miserable eyes. The heavy masses of the hills lay upon his breast, and in their eternal silences they buried the secret of his expiation! . . . But that was long ago, when this great Law was young—a stripling that punished death with death—and seldom in those days did his cold, keen eyes swerve in the performance of his duty! . . .

Within the town discussion soon died out, poisoned by its own unripeness. One must either accept the assassination as a sacred fact and meet all argument as the women did with the one incontrovertible phrase: “What right had he to murder children?” or else be reduced to helpless contradictions, to vacillation, to shifting grounds—as a drunken group might gravely

exchange their hats, yet get no farther on their homeward way !

Speculation wearied them finally, so they stopped talking ; and nothing on the surface reminded one of that fatal day. But amid the silence and the calm grew a great cloud of grim suspense. All waited—those who were indifferent to the catastrophe and its consequences, those who looked eagerly forward to the execution, and those who were uneasy about it—all ! . . . all waited for the inevitable, with the same vast, breathless suspense ! Had the Governor died of a fever in these days, or from an accident, none would have taken it for mere chance, but behind the given reason would have found a primary cause—invisible, unacknowledged.

Among the masses, as the foreboding grew, their thoughts turned often to the Kawatnaja lane. The lane itself was still and calm, as was the city ; and the swarming spies peered vainly for any signs of new uprising or criminal attempts. Here, as elsewhere, they heard rumours of the assassination of the Governor, but could never discover their source. All spoke of it, but in such an uncertain, even foolish way, that one could find no key to their talk.

“ Some mighty man — oh, a very mighty man, who could never possibly fail !—would undoubtedly kill the Governor one of these days ! ” That was all one could make of it.

The secret agent, Grigorjeff, overheard some such gossip one day as he sat in a low gin-shop

pretending to be drunk. Two workmen, who had already been drinking rather freely, sat at the next table, their heads together. Clumsily clinking their glasses, they talked in suppressed murmurs. "They'll kill him with a bomb!" said the first, evidently well informed. "What! with a bomb!" said the other, amazed.

"Certainly, with a bomb—what else?" reiterated the other. He puffed at his cigarette, blew the smoke in his companion's face, and added sternly: "It will blow him to a thousand little bits!"

"They said it would be on the ninth day."

"No," said the other, with a frown which expressed the highest degree of scornful negation. "Why the ninth day? That's superstition—that idea of the ninth day! They'll simply kill him early in the morning—that's all!"

"When?"

Shielding his face with his outspread hand, he lurched suddenly forward and hissed into his companion's ear: "Next Sunday week!"

Silently they stared into each other's grim, bleary eyes, both swaying to and fro. Then the first lifted a threatening finger and said, with impressive secrecy:

"Do you understand?"

"They'll never miss him . . . no! They're not that kind."

"No," said the other, with lowering brows. "How could we miss? The pack is stacked. . . . We hold four aces."

“A whole handful of trumps——” added the other.—“You understand, don’t you?”

“Yes, of course I understand!”

“Then, if you understand, we’ll drink to it. Aren’t you afraid of me now, Wanja?”

They whispered for some time, blinking and nodding, and upsetting the empty bottles in their eagerness. . . . That same night they were arrested, yet nothing suspicious was found upon them, and the preliminary examination showed that they did not know the slightest thing, and had only repeated vague rumours.

“But how did you happen to know the very day . . . that Sunday!” asked the angry officer who was conducting the examination.

“Can’t say,” said the man, somewhat cowed—he had been three days without drinking or smoking—“I was drunk!”

“I’d like to send you all to——” fumed the lieutenant—but he did not finish his remark.

Even the ones who were sober were no better. They spoke freely of the Governor in the workshops and on the streets, raged at him, and exulted at his approaching death—yet never anything definite—and soon they stopped talking and waited patiently. Now and again passing labourers exchanged comments.—“He drove by again yesterday without any guard.”

“He’s walking into the trap himself!” And they went about their work. But next day a whisper ran through the shops:

“Yesterday he drove down the lane!”

“ Let him drive! ”

They counted each day of his life . . . their number seemed too great! . . . Twice the rumour of his death was started. It spread suddenly in the Kawatnaja lane, and immediately grew to certainty in the factories. It was impossible to say how it arose but, scattered in little groups, they told each other the details of the murder: the street, the hour, the number of the murderers—the weapon! Some could have sworn they heard the explosion. And all stood there, pale, determined; outwardly neither glad nor sorry: till at last word came that it was a false alarm. Then they separated, just as calmly, and without disappointment—as though it were not worth while to be excited over an affair that was postponed but for a few days at most . . . or perhaps a few hours—or even minutes!

Both in the city and in the Kawatnaja lane the women were the harshest, most unrelenting judges. They produced no evidence, they gave no verdict—they simply bided their time! And on their waiting, they laid the coals of their unshakable belief; the whole burden of their unhappy lives; and the hideousness of their depraved, hungry, smothered thoughts. They had in their daily lives one special adversary that the men did not know . . . the oven!—the ever-hungry, open-mouthed oven; more awful than the glowing fires of hell! From morning till night, throughout their days, and every day,

it held them in its sway; eating their soul, casting out from their brains all thought, save that which concerned itself.

The men knew nothing of this. When a woman waked at dawn and saw the stove—the oven door half open—it worked on her fancy like a ghost; gave her a sickening sense of disgust and fear, and dull, brutish terror!

Robbed of her thoughts, she hardly knew what had robbed her; and in her confusion humbly offered up her soul again each day before this altar; black, deadly misery wrapping her as in a veil. And thus the women in the Kawatnaja lane became so fierce and hard! They beat their children—beat them nearly to death!—quarrelled amongst themselves, and with their husbands, and their mouths streamed with abuse, complaints and wantonness.

In those three terrible weeks of famine, when for days no fires were made—then at last, the women rested . . . that strange, calm rest of the dying whose pains have ceased some moments before the end! Their thoughts, freed for an instant from those iron bands, fastened with all their passion and power to the vision of a new life . . . as though this strike were not about the monthly wages of the men, but about a full and glad release of their eternal bonds. And in those heavy days when they buried their little children . . . dead from exhaustion! . . . and numb with pain, weariness and hunger—bewailed them with bloody tears—the women grew

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kind and gentle as never before ! They were convinced that such horrors could not have been sent without a purpose—that some vast reward must follow their sufferings.

So when on the 17th of August the Governor stepped out before them, into the Square shimmering in the sunlight, they took him for the dear Lord Himself—with his grey beard. . . . And he said :

“ You must go back to your work ! I cannot talk to you till you have gone back to your work.”

Then : “ I will see what I can do for you. Get to work and I shall write to Petersburg ! ”

Then : “ Your employers are not robbers, but honourable men, and I forbid you to speak so of them. And if you are not back at your work by to-morrow, I shall lock up the shops and send you all to the workhouse ! ”

Then : “ It is your own fault that the children died ! Take up your work again ! ”

Then : “ If you act like this, and do not disperse, I'll have you driven off ! ” . . .

Then followed a chaos of howls ; babies crying ; the whine of bullets ; pushing ; and a wild flight ! They do not know themselves where they are fleeing to—they fall ! Up again and on—children and home are lost ! . . . Then suddenly again, in the twinkling of an eye, there sits the cursed oven !—stupid, insatiable, with its everlasting open mouth ! . . . And the same old round begins again from which they

thought to have torn themselves for ever; and to which they have returned . . . for ever! . . . X 11

Perhaps the idea of the Governor's assassination emanated from the women's brains. The well-worn words in which man had been wont to clothe his hatred for man no longer sufficed them. Loathing! Contempt! Rage! — it transcended all these . . . it was a feeling of calm, unqualified condemnation . . . If the axe in the headsman's hands could feel, it might have this emotion—that cool, sharp, shining, steady blade! The women waited quietly; without wavering and without doubts.

And while they wait they take their fill of the good, fresh air—the same air that the Governor breathes! . . . They are like children. If a door chances to slam, or someone runs clattering down the lane, they rush out—bareheaded and excited. . . . “Is he dead yet?”

“No—it was only Ssenjka running to the shop for vodka.”

And so it goes till another knock comes, or a sudden rush of feet, to break the deadly silence of the street.

When the Governor drives by they peer at him eagerly from behind the curtains; and when he has passed, go back to their ovens again. It did not surprise them that the Governor, who had always been followed by guards, suddenly appeared without an escort . . . the headsman's axe, if it could feel, would not be astonished at the sight of a bare throat! It was quite

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in the order of things that the throat should be bare.

They sat and spun their gruesome threads—these grey, dismal women with their grey, dismal lives—and it was they who awakened that hoary old Law that punished death with death.

X Their sorrow for their dead was suppressed and torpid; it was only a part of their great general pain, and they gulped it down as the great briny ocean would swallow one small briny tear. X But on Friday of the third week after the deluge of blood, Nastassja Saasnova, whose little girl (Tanja, only seven) had been killed, went suddenly mad! For three weeks she had worked over her oven like all the rest; had quarrelled with her neighbours, had beaten her other children—and all at once, without any warning, she went insane. X

It began in the morning. Her hand trembled, and she broke a cup; then it all came over her with a sickening shock, and she forgot what she was about, ran from one thing to another, and repeated foolishly. “O God, what am I doing?” . . . Then finally she was quite silent! And dumb, with stealthy tread, she slid from corner to corner, taking things up and putting them down—moving them from place to place—and even, in the beginning of her madness, hardly able to tear herself away from the stove. The children were in the garden flying their kites, and when little Petjka ran in for a piece of bread he found his mother stealthily hiding all sorts

of things in the oven—a pair of shoes, an old coat, and his cap! At first the boy laughed, but when he caught sight of his mother's face he ran shrieking into the street. “A—a—ai!” he screamed as he ran, and set the lane in wild alarm.

The women gathered and began to whimper over her like frightened dogs. But she only widened her circles, breaking through their detaining arms; gasped for air and mumbled to herself. Piece by piece she jerked off her rags till, stripped to the waist, her lean and haggard body, with its withered, dangling breasts, showed yellow against the wall. Then with a long and hideous wail she repeated, over and over: “I can't! Oh, my dear, I can't—I can't—I can't—I can't!” and ran out into the street, the others following.

Then the whole lane was transformed for one instant into a single shrill howl; it was impossible to tell who was crazy and who was not. The panic subsided when the men ran out from the shops, bound the maniac hand and foot, and poured a bucket of water over her. She lay there in a puddle by the roadside, her naked bosom pressed to the earth, her fists and the blue, mottled arms stretched stiffly forward.

She had turned her face to the side, and her eyes were wild and glaring; her wet grey hair was pressed close to her head, making it seem pitifully small; her whole body was shaken with convulsive jerks. Out from the factory ran her

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husband, in a fright. He had not washed his sooty face, his shirt was shiny with oil and grime, and a burned finger on his left hand was tied up with a greasy rag.

“Nastja!” he called, bending over her, stern and harsh. “What do you mean? What is the matter with you?” She turned her dumb glassy stare at him and shuddered. He saw the purple bloodshot arms they had so pitilessly bound; loosened the ropes and smoothed her naked yellow shoulder. . . . Then came the police! . . .

When the crowd dispersed two men among them neither went back to the factory nor stayed in the lane: but they went their way slowly to the city. They walked along keeping step; silent and pondering. At the outlet of the Kawatnaja lane they parted.

“What a scene!” said one. “Are you going my way?”

“No!” said the other curtly, and strode along. He had a young tanned throat, and under his cap a shock of curly yellow hair.

VI

SOONER or later the news of the Governor's assassination had crept into the palace, but here they took it with an extraordinary indifference. As the close presence of the strong man in his full powers hindered their knowledge of the fact that this death meant *his* death! . . . they regarded it only as a temporary hallucination. Toward the middle of September, the household returned to town, at the urgent request of "The Pike" who had convinced Maria Petrovna that the country was not safe. And there life took on its accustomed aspect . . . the routine of many years.

Kosloff, the aide, who loathed the dirt and the banal decorations of the Governor's mansion, had personally supervised its refurnishing. He bought fresh hangings for the walls and reception-rooms, had the ceilings retinted, and ordered new furniture . . . green oak in the style of the Decadence! He quite took upon himself the supervision of the house, to the delight of all; from the servants who were infused with his energy, to Maria Petrovna, who hated all domestic cares. In spite of its roominess the palace was most inconveniently arranged. The bathrooms were next to the reception-rooms, and the

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lackeys had to carry their dishes down a long cold corridor past the windows of the dining-hall, where one could see them quarrelling and nudging each other as they went. All this Kosloff wished to change, but he had to postpone his plans till summer.

"He will be pleased," he said to himself, meaning the Governor—but strangely enough this image did not call forth in his mind Peter Iljitch, but some other! Yet in his eager bustle of reform he was not at all conscious of this thought.

As usual Peter Iljitch was the centre of his family, and the expressions, "His Excellency ordered it," "His Excellency wishes . . ." "His Excellency would be angry . . ." were now as ever the household words; and yet, had they set up a puppet in his place, dressed in the Governor's uniform, and let it speak a few words, it would have made no difference—so much of the office was but empty form!

If he fell into a rage and shouted at a man, and that man trembled, it looked as though the rage and the trembling both were simulated, and that nothing of the sort had really taken place. Even had he committed a murder in these days, that very death would have seemed counterfeited. As far as concerned himself, he still lived; but to the others he had already died, and they handled the dead carelessly, and felt the cold and the gloom that emanated from him without quite understanding what it meant.

Thought can kill in time ! Drawing its strength from the Eternal Sources, it is mightier than engines, weapons, or powder ! It robs men of their will, and makes even the instinct of self-preservation blind. It clears a free space for its deadly stroke ; as the forest underbrush is cleared about the tree that must be felled ! So this thought was killing the Governor ! . . . As the child, when the time of its fruition is complete, struggles from its mother's womb, this imperious death-dealing thought—till now giving evidence of its being only by the muffled beating of its heart—strove irresistibly toward the light, and began to lead an individual life. Imperiously it called up those from the dark who should do the deed, and hailed them as saviour !

Unconsciously the people held themselves aloof from the one dedicated to death, and robbed him of that invisible but mighty shield that the life of the mass forms for the life of the individual.

After the first anonymous letter calling the Governor "Butcher . . ." a few days passed without any such missives. Then, as if with silent accord, they began literally to shower upon him, as though they had poured from a slit in the post-bag ; and each morning the stack of envelopes on his desk grew higher. In different quarters of the town, out of different post-boxes, these letters were segregated from the other mail by different people ; gathered into a heap, and brought to their common destination—this one man ! Formerly the Governor had

received anonymous letters, sometimes with abuse and veiled threats, mostly denunciations and complaints, but he had never read them. Now, however, he felt himself impelled to read them; as he was forced, too, to think constantly of his own death. . . . And reading and reflection both required solitude! . . .

Seldom through the day, but oftener towards evening, he sat at his disordered desk with a glass of tea untasted by his side, shrugged his broad shoulders, put on his strong, gold-rimmed spectacles, examining the envelopes of the letters as he opened them. He had learned to know them at a glance. For, in spite of differences in writing, paper, and post-marks, they had something in common—like the dead in the engine-house! . . . and not only he, but the lodgekeeper, who took in Peter Iljitch's private correspondence, recognised them unerringly.

The Governor read each letter attentively—earnestly—from beginning to end; and if any words were illegible, he puzzled over them long, as to their meaning. Uninteresting ones, or those that contained only filthy abuse, he destroyed; also those which gave him friendly warning of his coming assassination. All others he numbered and filed, for some reason unknown to himself. In general their contents were wearisomely monotonous. Friends warned, foes threatened—and the matter dwindled into a series of inconclusive “Ayes” and “Noes.”

From constant repetition he was quite used to

the words "Murderer" on the one hand . . . and "Steadfast Defender of Order" on the other, and to a certain extent had accustomed himself to that other thought . . . that friend and foe alike believed in the inevitable approach of his death ! . . . A cold shudder ran over him. He would gladly have warmed himself, but there was nothing to warm him. . . . The tea was cold ! . . . they always brought him cold tea lately, for some reason ! . . . and even the high tiled stove was cold ! . . . Long ago—soon after he had come here—he had intended to build a fireplace, but he had put it off, and the old Dutch oven gave very little heat, no matter how much coal you burned ! . . . In vain he hugged the lukewarm tiles, then paced the floor up and down, saying, in his deepest regimental tones : "I've grown to be a perfect hothouse plant !" . . . Then he sat down to his letters again, looking for something important or decisive.

"YOUR EXCELLENCY !—You are a General, but Generals are mortal too. Some Generals die a natural death, and some by violence. You, your Excellency, [†]will die a violent death !

"I have the honour to subscribe myself, your Excellency's most obedient servant. . . ."

The Governor smiled—at that time he could still smile—and was about to tear the carefully written page when he bethought himself, made a marginal note : "No. 43, Sept. 22, 190—," and filed it.

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“MY LORD GOVERNOR! (or to be more correct, MY LORD TURKISH PASHA!)—You are a thief and a hired assassin! . . .

“I’d swear to God you turned a pretty penny on that transaction when you murdered the working men. . . .”

The Governor turned purple, crumpled the note in his fist, pulled off his spectacles and roared, with the roll of a big bass drum:

“R-r-r-r-apscallion!”

Then he dug his hands into his pockets, stuck out his elbows and began to pace the floor in a feverish rage . . . keeping time with the rhythm of: “This-is-the-way-the-Gov-ern-ors walk!”

When he had quieted himself he smoothed out the letter, read it to the end, numbered it with an unsteady hand, and filed it carefully. “He must certainly see that,” he said, thinking of his son.

That same evening Fate sent him another letter. It was signed “A LABOURER.” Apart from the signature, however, nothing in the letter denoted the brawny craftsman—miserable and uneducated—which was the Governor’s conception of “labourer.”

“Here in the works, and in town, they say that you are to be killed soon. I don’t know precisely who will do it, but I think it will not be the agents of any organisation; but rather a volunteer from among the citizens, who are

roused by your brutal proceedings against the workmen on August 17th. I frankly say that I and some of my party are against this resolution, not because we pity you—had you yourself any pity on the women and the children that day?—and I think that no one in the place has any pity for you! . . . but simply because I am opposed in principle to any violent death. I am against War, Capital Punishment, Political Execution . . . and against murder in general!

“In the battle for our ideals—Liberty, Fraternity and Equality—we should make use only of such weapons as do not contradict these ideals. Death is a weapon of that evil, old-world order whose device is Slavery, Privilege and Enmity. Good can never come from evil, and in the battle where force is the weapon, the victor can never be ‘the Right,’ but ‘Might’; that is, the one is more pitiless, more inhuman . . . no respecter of persons, and not above using any weapons—in one word, a Jesuit!

“If a scrupulous man were forced to shoot, he would certainly either shoot in the air, or else commit some folly that would get him into trouble; because his soul would revolt at the work of his own hands. I hold that many of the well-known unsuccessful political assassinations have been wrecked on this point, because the victims have been rogues capable of taking every advantage, while the instruments have been men of honour, who have perished for the cause. You may be sure, my Lord Governor,

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that if all the people who attempt the lives of your kind were rascals, they would surely find such loopholes and methods as would not enter into an honest man's head, and you would all long since have been dispatched.

“ From my point of view the Revolution can merely be a propaganda of ideas—in the sense in which the Christian Martyrs were revolutionists. For even if the labourers did win a battle, the Rascals would only pretend to be beaten to gain time for new trickery, and to get back at their foe. We must conquer with our heads, not with our fists ; for as regards the head, the Rascals are rather weak ! For this reason they even hide books from the poor man, condemning him to darkness of ignorance because they fear for their existence. Do you know why they won't allow the workmen the eight-hour labouring day ? Do you think the gentlemen did not know themselves that in eight hours of intelligent work the production would be no less than in eleven now ? But the thing is this—that with the eight-hour law, the men would have time to learn as much as their masters, and would take the work out of their hands. These people only think they are wise, because they have made all the others stupid—against a really clever man they would not be worth a sou !

“ I have gone so deeply into the discussion of these questions, in order that you should not misunderstand my first words against your assassination, and consider me a traitor to the

common cause of all other honourable men. I must furthermore add that I and my mates who share my convictions were not in the Square on the 17th, because we knew very well what the end would be, and did not care to stand there like the fools who believed that Justice was to be had from one of your kind !

“ Now, naturally the others agree with us and say : ‘ If we go there again we won’t ask, we’ll strike ! ’ According to my mind that’s equally foolish . . . because, as I say : why go there at all ? You yourself will come to us soon enough with friendly words and bows—and then we’ll show you ! . . .

“ Honoured Sir, Forgive my boldness, that I should have come to you with my working-man’s talk—for I have learned by myself all I know out of books—but it seems strange to me that an educated man who is not such a rascal as all the rest, could act so to the miserable working men who trusted him . . . that he could order them shot ! . . . Maybe you will have a guard of Cossacks, a detachment of the Secret Service, or take a trip somewhere—and so save your life ; and then my words may be of some use, and point out to you the right way to serve the true interests of the nation.

“ They say here in the works that you were bought by Capital ! . . . but I don’t believe that, for our employers aren’t so stupid as to throw away their money . . . and besides that, I know you can’t be bribed . . . and are no thief

either, like the others in the service who need the money for their chorus-girls and champagne and truffles. I might even say that in the main you are a man of honour. . . .”

The Governor laid the letter carefully upon the table, triumphantly took his moist spectacles from off his nose, polished them ceremoniously with the corner of his handkerchief, and said, with stately deference :

“ I thank you, young man.”

Slowly he walked down the room and turned to the cold tile stove, saying impressively : “ You may take my life, it belongs to you. . . . But my honour——”

He did not end the phrase, but held his head high, and stalked back to the writing-table, a trifle absurd in his ponderous dignity. . . .

“ I might even say that in the main you are a man of honour . . . in the main a man of honour . . . in the main a man of honour—who wouldn't hurt a chicken without cause, but how could you, an honourable man, be responsible for such an order? That is the question, honoured sir ! The people are not chickens ! The people are sacred ! And if you could understand the masses and their sufferings, you would go out into that same Square, bow yourself humbly to the earth and beg for forgiveness.

“ Think, from generation to generation—from kindred to kindred, since that time of the first

slaves, who, at the bidding of their tyrannical princes built the Pyramids, we have led this existence ! As there are among you hereditary nobles—that is, oppressors—so among us there are hereditary labourers, hereditary slaves. And consider further, that in all these ages we have been only beaten and oppressed, and as far back into the past as I can trace my ancestry I see nothing but tears, despair, ill-treatment. And all this is stamped upon the soul—and all this has been kept as the sole heritage, from father to son, from mother to daughter. Attempt to look into the soul of a simple peasant or labourer—a shuddering horror ! While we are yet unborn we have suffered a thousand wrongs. When we finally crawl forth into life we stumble into a sort of cavern, where we are nourished on wrongs and clothe ourselves in our wrongs !

“ They tell me that somewhere, five years ago, you ordered the knout for the peasants—do you realise what you did then ? You thought you had only flayed their backs. No, you stripped their souls, enslaved for ages. You flogged the dead, and the yet unborn ! And though you may be a General and an Excellency—yet I make bold to say you are not fit to lay your lips in adoration on one of those sacred peasant backs, much less to lay the lash !

“ And when the workmen came to you, who was it, do you think, who came ? . . . Those were the slaves who built the Pyramids—they rose and came with their thousands of years of

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chafings and groans, to ask for kindness, for help, for counsel! Came to you, as to an enlightened and humane man of the twentieth century. And how did you treat them? Ah! You! . . . Your forefather perhaps was an overseer over these same slaves and beat them with stripes, and then handed down to you this foolish hatred for the working classes!

"Honoured Sir! The masses are awakening. At present they are only turning in their sleep, and already the pillars in your house are tottering; but wait till they are quite awake. These words of mine are new to you—think them over! . . . Furthermore, I ask your pardon that I have troubled you so long, and in the name of the 'Brotherhood,' I hope they may not kill you."—

"They will kill me, though," thought the Governor, as he folded up the letter. For an instant the picture of old Jegor, with his steel-grey hair, rose in his mind, only to vanish in the boundless darkness of its void.

No vestige of thought was left in him, nothing either of contradiction or of assent. He stood by the burnt-out stove—on the table the lamp glowed under its green silk shade—in another room his daughter was playing the piano; someone seemed to be teasing her Excellency's pug, for he began to bark viciously—and still the lamp burned. . . .

The lamp burned!

VII

IN the next few days no letters came. The sendings stopped abruptly, as by preconcerted action, and the silence that followed held something sinister and unusual. The sudden cessation gave the feeling that the end was not yet come, that somewhere in the void something was taking its course; that a new phase had entered into the Thought, and was shaping things in secret. And time sped by, with a swoop of its mighty pinions—each upward swing a day, each downward sweep a night!

Twice the Pike had interviewed her Excellency at a most unusual hour. He scolded the man in the ante-room who helped him off with his coat, rowing him in energetic whispers as though he were one of his own policemen, or a cabby. And when the coat was off and he was drawing on his fresh white gloves, he bent his sleek head condescendingly to the fellow's side-whiskers, gnashed his musty-tobacco-stained teeth, and held his half-gloved hand, with fingers dangling limp, close over his nose. (He always did this at the slightest contact with a lackey.) . . . Then, assuming the manner of a man of the world, he mounted the stairs.

Formerly he would never have dared to scold

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the Governor's servants, but now things were come to such a pass that he not only did, but must. Last night a highly suspicious character had been arrested by one of the secret agents, close to the entrance of the palace! At a distance he had followed the Governor on his accustomed morning stroll; then had hung about the palace all day, peering in at the basement windows, hiding behind the trees, and conducting himself in a most suspicious manner. On his arrest they found neither weapons, papers, nor any other treasonable articles about him; and they recognised him as the suburbanite Ipatikoff—furrier by trade. His statements were vague and shift. He asserted that he had only passed the house once, and seemed to be hiding something. On searching his quarters they found but a few rotten skins, a boy's fur coat unfinished, and other appurtenances of his trade. Household goods there were none—no weapons, no papers. The case seemed in the highest degree mysterious. None of the Governor's household—the lodge-keeper nor anyone else—had observed him, though he had passed the main entrance at least a dozen times.

In the night a spy tried the door to test the matter and, finding it unlocked, walked into the porter's lodge, scratched his name on the wall as a proof of his presence, and then walked out again unnoticed. The gatekeeper pleaded forgetfulness as his excuse for not locking up. . . . " But at such a time, when such an attempt was to be

expected, that sort of carelessness was unpardonable ! “

“ I’m in an awful fix, your Excellency,” complained the Pike to the Governor’s lady, laying his white-gloved hand on his scented breast. “ His Excellency won’t listen to the idea of a body-guard ! The Secret Service men are dog-tired (excuse the expression) with their everlasting trotting after him . . . and to tell you the truth, it’s all nonsense anyway, because the first scoundrel that comes along could catch him around the corner, or hit his Excellency with a stone over the wall. . . . If anything should happen—which God forbid !—people will say : ‘ The Chief of Police is to blame ! The Chief of Police did not watch out ! ’ What can I do against his Excellency’s damned stubbornness ? Excuse the expression, your Excellency, but fancy the position I’m in ! It really is too—— I’ll bid you good-day, your Excellency ! ”

It developed that the Pike had prepared a programme. The Governor was to get a few months’ furlough and travel for his health—any one of the foreign baths would do. Things were quiet in the city now, and he was in high favour at St Petersburg—there would be no trouble on that score !

“ Otherwise I can guarantee nothing, your Excellency ! ” continued the Chief, with feeling. . . . “ Human powers have their limits, your Excellency, and I tell you frankly I cannot answer for anything ! . . . After two or three months

it will all happily be forgotten, and then—Welcome home, your Excellency. It will be just the season of the Italian Opera. We'll give a gala performance—and then his Excellency can take his walks abroad to his heart's content."

"What nonsense about the opera!" said the Governor's lady, yet she approved of the proposition, as she herself was most uneasy.

On his way out the Chief of Police stopped at the lodge to bully the porter again.

"I'll teach you! I'll make your chin-whiskers stand up, you fat-faced fool! He grows chin-whiskers like a Lord Chancellor—the son of a gun! . . . and thinks he doesn't have to lock the door! I'll make you dance. You——"

That evening Maria Petrovna begged her husband to take her abroad with the children.

"Oh, please, Pievna, won't you?" she said in her tired voice, her eyes drooping under their long dark lashes. Her face was thickly powdered, and her yellow, flabby cheeks dangled like a pointer's as she shook her head. "You know I've not been at all well lately, and really I must go to Carlsbad."

"Can't you and the children go without me?"

"Ah, but no, Pievna! What makes you talk like that? I'd be so worried if you were not there. Please."

She did not say what would worry her—her object was clear without that. To her great surprise, Peter Iljitch readily agreed to the plan—though under ordinary circumstances her mere

mention of a wish called forth his opposition. . . . At least that used to be their way!

"They certainly can't lay that to cowardice," thought the Governor. "It isn't any plan of mine—and maybe she really does need a cure. She looks as yellow as a lemon. . . . Besides, there's always plenty of time for them to kill me . . . and if they don't attempt anything it will prove that I am right, and they are wrong! . . . Then I'll resign—and then I shall build the finest kind of a conservatory. . . ."

Even while these thoughts were passing he was convinced that he would neither have the trip nor the conservatory! That was why he had given such prompt assent. And after he had consented, he forgot the circumstances immediately as though they did not concern him in the least. He hesitated for a long time about the arrangements for his furlough, set the date, changed it, and then forgot the thing completely till two days after the time he had appointed. Then again he named a day . . . but again he forgot it deliberately. Moreover, his wife, whose mind was completely set at rest at the mere idea of their departure, did not urge him to hurry—she had her fall wardrobe to finish, and tailors and dressmakers took all her time. . . besides, Cissy was not nearly ready.

In the lonely silence surrounding the Governor since the sudden stopping of the letters, he felt something incomplete—like the echo of a soft voice in the distance—as if he sat in an empty

room, with someone speaking behind the wall, the vibrations of whose voice could be felt but not heard. And when another letter came—a final belated letter—he went forward to take it as though he had long been expecting it, and was much surprised to see that it was in a slender, delicately tinted envelope with a forget-me-not stamped on the back. But it did not come in the morning like all the other letters which had been posted the night before, but with the evening mail—showing that it had been written the same day. The notepaper was of the same pale shade, and was also stamped with the blue forget-me-not. The writing was painstaking and distinct; the lines slanted heavily, as though the writer were not quite sure of her syllables and, rather than divide the words, ran them down the page in a small, cramped hand. At times she began to write downhill long before the end of the line, in tiny little letters, in the evident fear that she would not have room for the rest of the sentence. And the words all seemed to be coasting down the snowy page—the smallest one in front, on their little sleds.

The letter was signed “A SCHOOL GIRL.”

“Last night I dreamed about your funeral, and I am going to write you about it—even if it isn’t right, and if it does harm the poor workmen, and the little girls that you killed! But you’re a poor old man yourself, and so I’m writing you this letter.

" I dreamed that you were not buried in a black coffin, as all older people are, but in a white one, like the ones for little girls—and it was policemen that went down Moscow Street carrying your coffin—and they didn't carry it with their hands, but on their heads. And a great crowd of policemen walked behind. But none of your friends were there; and none of the people in the city. And all the doors and windows were barred when you were carried by—as they are at night!

" I was so frightened that I waked up, and began to think about it—and that is what I am going to write you about. . . . I thought maybe there is no one at all who will cry for you when you are dead. The people in your house are all hard and selfish, and only care about themselves; and perhaps when you die they'll be glad, because they think then they can be Governor! I do not know your wife, but I don't believe there can be very many gentle and kind ladies in those circles of pleasure and pride.

" No respectable people would ever go to your funeral, of course, for they are all angry at the way you treated the workmen . . . and one man even said they wanted to put you out of the club, but they were afraid of the Government! . . . Masses won't do any good, because you know yourself our Bishop would just as soon say a Mass for a dead dog if he got money enough for it. . . . And when I think that you probably

know all this without my telling you, then I feel very sorry for you—as if you were really a friend of mine. I've only seen you twice: once on Moscowa Street—but that was long ago—and the second time at our school exhibition, when you drove up with the Bishop . . . but, of course, you wouldn't remember me then . . . and I promise you faithfully that I'll pray for you, and that I'll cry over you as though I really had been your daughter, because I am very, very sorry for you.

“*P.S.*—Please burn this letter! But I am so awfully sorry for you.”

He loved that little schoolgirl.

Late that night, just before going to bed, he stepped out on to the balcony—that same balcony from which he had given the signal with his white handkerchief! . . . The cold fall rains had already set in, and the night was black and dismal. In this heavy autumnal darkness one felt how far away the sun was, how long it had been gone, and how late the dawn would be. Far to the left in the driveway burned two bright lanterns with reflectors, and their white light penetrated the darkness, yet did not banish it. . . . There it still lay—quiet, close, ponderous.

The city doubtless slept already, for not a lighted window was to be seen, and no wheels sounded in the dim-lit streets. Under one of the lanterns something gleams vaguely—probably a puddle. . . .

School had closed for the day, and she no doubt has long since done her lessons, and now sleeps quietly somewhere in this black, silent space—from whence they send their letters with their threats—from whence his death is about to come. . . . But there, too, lives this little child, who sleeps just now, but who will weep for him when his time comes.

How quiet it is, how dark—how silent

VIII

TWO weeks before the Governor's death, a linen-covered package was handed in to the Government House—its value declared at three roubles. It proved to be an infernal machine—a bomb intended to explode on being opened. But it was badly made by the unskilled hands of one who had only read of such things—so it missed fire. Yet in the very home-made simplicity of the outfit there was something sinister and terrifying, as if blind Death had stretched forth his hand and was fumbling clumsily about in the dark.

The police sounded the alarm, and Maria Petrovna insisted upon her husband's wiring to St Petersburg that very day, to ask for sick leave. She herself drove first to the tailor's, and then wrote her son a long letter full of horrors—all in French. . . .

A strange and radical change had come over the Governor. In place of the man they used to know appeared an entirely new figure. No one knew precisely when the change came about, and in the main he seemed the same; but upon his face had dawned such an expression of righteousness it seemed a new countenance. He smiled where formerly he would have been grave, and frowned where he had been wont to smile;

he was bored and indifferent where he used to be attentive and animated. He was horribly candid in the expression of his feelings. When he chose, he was silent ; left the room when he felt inclined, and turned his back when people bored him.

Those who had counted for years on his liking and friendship, who knew all his thoughts and moods, felt themselves suddenly neglected—quite shoved aside—and could no longer understand his feelings and fancies. All the bows and smiles and cordial greetings had suddenly disappeared—the little ceremonious form of politeness : “ If you will be so good, my dear fellow ! ” — “ I am vastly obliged to you, my dear sir ! ” — which had seemed like second nature to him, he dropped completely ; and people were taken aback at the remarkable, even alarming originality of his new manner. So animals, accustomed to looking on a man’s apparel as the person himself, might be taken aback at the sight of a naked figure.

He had simply ceased to be polite—and directly the bond was broken which had held him throughout many years to his wife, his children, his associates—as though it had only been made of smiles and compliments, and had vanished together with the ceremonious kissing of the hand. He did not judge them, he did not hate them ; found nothing new or repulsive in them—they simply fell out of his soul ; as decayed teeth crumble in the mouth . . . as

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the hair falls out . . . as a dead skin is sloughed off—painlessly, quietly, without an effort. When the veil of custom and politeness fell from him, he stood there forsaken and aloof; yet he did not even feel it—as though loneliness had been his natural state throughout his long, eventful life.

He forgot his morning greetings, he forgot to say good-night; and when his wife held out her hand, or his daughter Cissy lifted her smooth forehead to his lips, he was not quite sure what to do with the hand or the forehead. When guests came to luncheon—the Vice-Governor and his wife, or Kosloff—he did not rise, or bow, or smile, but went hastily on with his meal—and when he had finished he did not ask to be excused, but simply rose and left the room.

“Where are you going, Pievna? Please stay with us, we are so lonely. They’ll bring the coffee soon.” He answered calmly: “No! I’d rather go to my study. I don’t want any coffee,” and the rudeness of the answer was lost in its candour and simplicity.

He cared nothing about Cissy’s new clothes, did not greet the guests of the house, let her Excellency invent excuses for his absence, had nothing to do with society, and refused to accept statements without an explanation of motives. Twice a week he received petitioners, and listened to each attentively, with an interest that seemed even a trifle rude, as he inspected the petitioner from head to foot. “Are you

convinced that it will be better so?" he asked, after he had listened patiently; and when the astonished man had given an affirmative answer he promised immediately to grant his request. In these days he never considered the possibility of overstepping the limits of his powers, or else he had an exaggerated impression of them; at all events, he often decided matters which were quite out of his province. The new Governor, in consequence, had many difficulties with the entanglements that resulted—all the more so as some of the questions were of the most complex and illegal character.

In order to dispel her husband's gloom, Maria Petrovna often came to his study, felt of his forehead to see if he were feverish, and began to talk about their trip. But he held her off with blunt directness. "Yes, very well, run along now! I would rather be alone. You have your own room, and I don't bother you there."

"Ah, how you have changed, Pievna!"

"Nonsense! Nonsense!" he said, in his gruffest tones, leaning his back up against the cold stove. "Do go and make that pug of yours shut up. You can't hear a thing in the whole house for his barking!"

Of all his former habits, card-playing was the only one which he still enjoyed. Twice a week he had his whist, and he played for small stakes with keen and evident pleasure. He was a thoughtful, clever player, and if his partner

revoked he called him down in proper shape. "What are you thinking of, my dear sir! I led diamonds!" flashed out his cool, clear voice—hard and cutting as the diamond itself . . . and Maria Petrovna, in the next room, hearing her husband's voice, would smile her tired smile and shake her head sadly. Her yellow cheeks hung flabby as a pointer's; the powder stood out on her face, and her heavy, bulging, brownish lids rose and fell like iron shutters in a shop window. At this moment it seemed to her, as it did to all the others, utterly impossible that a person who could play cards like that could be assassinated.

Through the two long weeks before his death, he simply waited. Doubtless he had other feelings beside—thoughts of the daily routine, his surroundings, his past; the stale, old thoughts of a man whose body and mind are long since fossilised. Probably he thought of the workmen and that sad, awful day—but all these reflections were vague and superficial, and vanished as they came—like the light wind's ripple on the river—and again as before, the still, dark waters of his fathomless soul stood calm in silent waiting. It was as though politeness and habit only had united him to his mental processes, and when ceremony and custom vanished his ideas fled too. He was as isolated in his brain as he was in his family.

As usual he rose at seven, had his cold shower, drank his milk, and at eight o'clock took his accustomed stroll. Each time he crossed the

threshold of his palace he felt that he should never return—that the two hours' walk would prolong itself into an eternal wandering through the unknown. . . . With his red-lined General's cloak; tall, broad-shouldered, his grey head high with soldierly bearing; he marched through the city for two long hours like a stately ghost—past wooden houses dark with mould, past countless gates and empty squares, past shops whose clerks, shivering in the brisk morning air, bowed slavishly. Whether the pale October sun shone out, or the fine cold rain trickled down, unfailingly he rose and followed his orbit—a sad, majestic wanderer of the town, seeking death at the head of his column. Forward he marched through mire and puddle, the scarlet lining of his overcoat reflected in the mud; forward through the streets, not noticing policemen's salutes nor horses—and a bird's-eye view of his daily Road of Suspense would have shown an extraordinary tracery of short, straight lines, crossing and recrossing in a hopeless tangle. He seldom glanced to right or left, and never looked behind; yet scarcely even saw what was before him, so sunk was he in the depths of his dark forebodings. He rarely acknowledged greetings, and many a startled eye encountered his passing glance—direct, unseeing, and yet so penetrating.

Long after he was dead and buried, and the new Governor, a smiling young man surrounded by Cossack guards, drove rapidly through the

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city in his equipage of state, many recalled these last two long weeks of his pilgrimage—the grey-haired ghost in the General's uniform marching through the mire with upright carriage, the scarlet lining of his cloak glancing in the puddles ; and followed by the hoary old law : “ A life for a life ! ”

The crush and the jostling curiosity of the main streets wearied him, and he preferred to lose himself in the silent, squalid alleys, with their tiny three-room cottages, their broken fences, and slippery wooden sidewalks. Throughout these days he had but one desire — to go the length and breadth of Kawatnaja lane. But he could not bring himself to gratify this wish : it seemed too horrible, too painful, more painful than death itself. And a thrill of wonder came over him as he thought of that earlier September he had driven down the lane quite fearlessly, and had even wished that he might meet some one of the people, to speak to them in passing.

But one spot he never neglected. This was the street that led to the seminary, where each morning, just at nine, it swarmed with little schoolgirls. Forgetting his usual haste, he strode along here like some good-natured, whimsical old General, out for his morning walk. He nodded to them as they came : the big girls first, stately, tall and dignified ; then the little ones, with their short brown skirts and their huge knapsacks ; and they shyly answered his greeting.

His near-sighted eyes could not distinguish their faces. Large and small, in groups they came, and they seemed to him like a cluster of rosy petals. As the last one passed he smiled his quiet, ironical smile, a sly twinkle in his eye meanwhile, and then at the next corner he was transformed again into the silent, stately ghost, seeking death at the head of his column.

At first two spies, at their chief's secret command, trailed him at a distance ; but he did not observe them, as he never looked back. For some days they conscientiously followed his devious paths, but soon tired of it—it seemed so foolish to run after a man who was hanging about the most dangerous spots in such an idiotic way. So they stopped now and again at some friendly shop to gossip with a policeman, dropped in at an ale-house, and often lost sight of their charge for hours at a time.

"It's all the same—there's nothing to do anyway!" said one of them apologetically. He had the smug, shaven face of a priest, and seemed a prosy old fool. He was gulping down a hot *pâté*, and although he had not quite swallowed the first he was already reaching for the second. "When a man's in his dotage and runs into the trap himself, what are you going to do with him . . . will you kindly tell me?"

"Oh, it's only for form's sake," said the bar-keeper.

"And how about the Pike?" asked the second spy, a gloomy man who had seen better days,

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but was given to drink, and had been caught cheating at cards. Growling like a dog over his bone, he devoured everything in sight, drinking vodka steadily meanwhile ; and though he was never drunk, yet he never stopped drinking.

"What about the Pike ? He knows well enough that we aren't angels from heaven !"

"He acts like a horse in a fire . . . take him out of his stall and he rears and plunges. He'd sooner burn up than leave the stable," said the bar-keeper.

"No, he knows we aren't angels," repeated the first, with a sigh. And in fact they had very little in common with angels—these two poor devils—and it was quite beyond their feeble power to arrest the course of events !

. . . Home again over the familiar threshold, even then the Governor felt no thrill of relief, nor any surety of one more day of life. He took things as they came, and forgot the sense of his past wanderings in the awakening dread of what the day would yet bring forth. And the empty, idle days passed by with frightful haste—yet time stood still ; as if the mechanism that turned up each new day had been jarred and, instead of the following one, the same old day came round again. Even the calendar on his desk that he used to turn—usually at night, as though he were calling up the advancing day—even this stood pointing to that long-past date, and when occasionally he looked at that back number, his breast heaved, he knew not why,

and a feeling of sickness came to him as he turned his eyes away.

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed angrily. Nowadays when he was alone he often broke into short ejaculations, indefinite and disconnected. He was especially apt to say "Nonsense!" or "Disgusting!"

He did not fear death in the least, and viewed it quite impersonally. They would shoot at him; he would fall. . . . And then would come the funeral with the bands, and his Orders carried behind the coffin, etc. He'd go bravely forward to meet it. He did not even think of a life beyond the grave; for him it all ended here. And he ate with his usual appetite and slept soundlessly and dreamlessly.

Yet once in the night—and it was three days before his end—he must have had a heavy dream; for he awoke with the sound of his own hoarse, muffled groans. And as he recognised this strange, dull voice of his, and his eyes encountered the darkness, he felt the shudder and weakness of death. He huddled the clothes up over his head, drew up his bony knees, knotted himself into a bundle in the bed and, reviewing his whole past life, from infancy to age, he began to sob bitterly and softly; and whispered to the damp, white, silent pillow: "Have pity on me! Help me someone, whoever it is! Have mercy! O—o—o!"

But no one was there to pity him; and soon he was conscious through his tears of his great

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shaken frame in its strange, cramped attitude, and his rough, hoarse voice, and he mastered himself and lay still. And long he lay there silent, in the same tense pose, staring up wide-eyed into the dark. . . . And in the morning he started out again in his military cloak. For two days more its scarlet lining was reflected in the puddles by the wayside, and the tall, stately ghost stalked through the streets, seeking his grave at the head of his column.

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The affair came about very simply and quickly—like a picture in a biograph.

At the crossing of two streets was a dingy hay-market, open on Fridays; and here a hesitating voice arrested the Governor.

“Your Excellency!”

“Yes?”

He stood still and faced about.

From behind a lonely hedge across the street two men came hastily striding through the mud: one in high boots, the other in gaiters without overshoes, his trousers rolled up. These wet feet must make him very cold, for his face is greenish pale, and his thick blond hair stands out very stiffly from his head. . . . In his left hand he holds a folded paper, and the right is thrust deep into his pocket.

And directly all is clear; the victim knew that death had come, and they knew that he had seen it.

"If you please," said the man, and a convulsive tremor passed over his face.

"A petition? . . . What is it about?" the Governor asked superfluously too, but strangely impelled to play the scene out. Yet he did not reach for the petition. The fellow still held out his left hand with the bit of paper that would have deceived no one, and without handing it to the Governor he fumbled with his right hand for the revolver; knitting his brows in his endeavour to free it from the lining of his pocket.

The Governor cast one quick glance about. The squalid market-place, the mud littered with straw, the lonely hedge— Ah! But it was too late. He gave one short, deep, gasping sigh, and straightened up . . . without terror, and quite without defiance. Yet still there lay somewhere—perhaps in the deep-set wrinkles about his heavy nose—a quiet, almost imperceptible pleading for mercy—just a trace of remorse. But he himself was unconscious of this, and neither of the men observed it.

His death came in three quick shots, sounding together in rapid succession like a single loud report. Three minutes later a policeman hurried up, followed by the Secret Service men, and then the people, as though they had all been hanging about the neighbourhood, behind the corner, awaiting the end.

. . . And the corpse was covered over. . . .

Some ten minutes later the ambulance drove slowly through the streets with its red cross—

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and throughout the city questions and answers flew like stones :

“ Is he dead ? ” “ On the spot ! ” “ Who was it—did they arrest him ? ” “ No ; they got away. No one knows who it was. There were three men.”

And all day long they spoke only of the assassination, some with censure, some with joyful approbation. But through all their talk, whatever its character, one felt the shiver of a mighty terror. Something powerful and annihilating swept like a cyclone over their daily lives ; and from behind their dreary counters, their samovars, their beds and wheaten cakes, peered forth through the dimness of the commonplace the threatening figures of that hoary old Law of Revenge.

. . . And the little schoolgirl wept ! . . .

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Andreev, Leonid Nikolaevich

His Excellency the Governor. Tr. by Maurice Magnus.

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